

Wolves: Prey of Misinformation . . .

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populations. To place this in perspective, one must remember that over the past six years, hunting and trapping have removed about 12-20 percent of the estimated statewide population each year. This level of harvest is well below the levels that would be required to control or reduce the overall wolf population.

While there are valid concerns about the use of aircraft as a method of access in taking wolves, the idea that air transportation is contributing to the decimation of Alaska's wolf population is not one of them. In recent years aircraft have been the method of transportation used to take 30 to 40 percent of the total harvest, or about 200 to 300 wolves annually, out of a population now estimated at 5,900 to 7,200. (Air transportation as a method of access should not be confused with aerial hunting, or shooting out of a plane.)

One has to wonder about the reluctance of so many people, including experienced journalists, to accept that attitudes toward

wolves have changed for the better in wolf country as well as in areas to the south, and that hatred of wolves is not an issue in Alaska. Discussions about wolf management center around the relationship between wolves, other predators such as bears, and prey populations—not on whether wolves are “good” or “bad” animals. It is interesting to note that people seem to find it easy to accept that most Native Americans hold positive attitudes toward wolves but find it so difficult to accept that our own culture can do the same, even when the change in attitudes is as dramatic as this one has been. Personally, I have come to the conclusion that many people, particularly in the environmental community and in the media, do not want to believe that people in places such as Alaska have positive attitudes toward wolves. Without this belief, wolf management decisions become much more complicated for the public, make for less sensational articles for the press, and also lessen the fund-raising potential the issue

provides for some organizations.

Wolf populations are widespread and thriving in most of Alaska and Canada. They have actually expanded their range in these areas. One would think this would be welcome news to people concerned about the status of wolves. Instead, the fact that Alaskan and Canadian wolf populations are in such a secure position is rarely emphasized in popular articles or television documentaries.

Like most biologists, I sincerely appreciate the growing interest in wolves and the concern for their continued welfare. However, I am troubled that recently the focus of interest has stagnated, with misinformation a primary cause. I look forward to the day when we move past this self-righteous lament to focus on further improving the status of wolves, wild country, and man's relationship with both.

Bob Stephenson is a wildlife biologist with the Division of Wildlife Conservation, ADF&G, Fairbanks.

How Are Wolves Going to be Managed?

by Cathie Harms

Few challenges in wildlife are greater than answering the question, “How should wolves be managed?”

Wolf management in the past hasn't pleased many people and has cost a great deal of time and money. The Alaska Constitution requires the department to manage wildlife to benefit people. That doesn't mean just for hunters or photographers or just for any other use. Wolves are an important part of Alaska's ecosystems and their management is essential to successful management of other species.

We started working on a wolf management plan several years ago. In addition to wildlife research, we have talked to many people to learn the different values people hold for wolves. Because it is not possible to talk directly with every resident of the state, we established a citizen's advisory group to help us. We needed the group to reflect a wide range of interests, including hunters and trappers, environmentalists, conservationists, and educators as well as people from different parts of the state and different cultures. Twelve people were selected as members of the Alaska Wolf Management Planning Team. The team met six times during a six-month period and worked hard to arrive at a consensus on recommendations for wolf management, which are summarized in the Alaska Wolf Management Team's final report.

Our planning process involves three parts: 1) developing a zone concept (in a strategic management plan); 2) mapping

preliminary zone boundaries; and 3) writing area-specific management plans. We're in the first stage now.

Department staff have drafted a strategic wolf management plan which recommends a system of six zones ranging from total protection of wolves to intensive management of wolves. We're asking the public, agencies, groups, and individuals to review our draft plan and give us their comments, suggestions, ideas, or questions. We will be seeking comments until the Fall 1991 Board of Game meeting ends in Fairbanks on November 8.

After the Fall 1991 Board of Game meeting, we will finalize the zone concept, then work with the public to draft preliminary zone boundaries on a map of the state. We will also begin drafting some area-specific management plans which will detail what management activities will take place in specific areas. We hope to have drafts of the zone boundaries and the first area-specific management plans available for review by March 1992.

If you have any ideas, suggestions, or comments about how we can make progress on this project, we'd like to hear them. Informal input is needed at all stages, and opportunities for formal comments will be offered as well. For more information, please call, stop by, or write to an office of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

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